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SUBJECT Successful Efforts to Improve Village Economics

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1. Arriving in India on this present visit [redacted] and having traveled 25X1X almost constantly during the past several weeks in the real India--the rural areas--I am impressed by the change in attitude. Whereas three years ago the villagers (who make up 85% of the population of India) were lethargic and disinclined to face the responsibilities of life as citizens of a free nation, today, in general, they are alert to change and willing to participate in it, even though it means hard work over a long period. No longer can the villager blame the foreign Raj for a miserable diet and ragged clothes. He recognizes that with independence has come a responsibility for the nation to care for its own needs. Sometimes he translates this into a feeling that the Government should "spoon-feed" him with subsidies and other assistance. But even in this occasional reaction he is only proving that he is like many of his US and European cousins. Most Indian villagers realize that India will become the country of their dreams only if they devote themselves wholeheartedly to the business of improving their condition, both individually and collectively.
2. Even their conquerors have always commented upon the courtesy of the people of India. Today, as a self-respecting national of a free country, the Indian villager is as courteous as ever and, in addition, is anxious to demonstrate to visitors his effort toward progress, whether it be in the form of an improved fowl or a new foot-pedaled weaving unit. Five years ago the outsider was rarely invited into the home of a village family. On this trip I have found it quite different, regardless of whether I am on an official visit to a community or just on my own, shooting pictures. A few days ago in a remote West Bengal village which even in the dry season can be arrived at only by almost impassable roads, I wandered off from my group to speak to an old man. Neither of us could understand the actual words of the other, but we got along famously nevertheless. The villager invited us into his home. We gathered that he was a widower, but other members of his family were living with him and they greeted us with smiling friendliness and served refreshments. A daughter showed us, with pride, some new brassware. As the ladies of the family posed for the click of the Leica I could not but realize that I was in a new India.

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3. There are over 500,000 villages, and of course I have not been able to visit even a fair sample of these. But I have been in a sufficient number to convince me that it is the exceptional village that has seen no change in the past five years. In a country where formerly change took place in rural areas only in the slow evolution of centuries, a difference can now be noted in many villages in a matter of months. The progress often is small, but it is there. The Government's vast rural development program is taking root.
4. Five years ago India faced the future with little hope of "balancing food and people." Amazingly, this is now within the realm of possibility. With a repetition of the favorable weather conditions that blessed the crops last summer, India will be self-sufficient in food grains this year. This represents a tremendous achievement, even though it does not mean that India's millions will yet have anything resembling an adequate or balanced diet--most of them will still be poorly fed, and some, as always, will barely escape starvation. It does mean that India's agricultural production is coming close to meeting the country's minimum food requirements. Most of India possesses a combination of soil and climate capable of producing two good crops a year. However, until recently little was ever done to realize this potential through land reform and the introduction of improved seed and fertilizer, farm implements, proper animal utilization, etc. Perhaps the greatest miracle I have seen in my present travels through the rural areas is the new enthusiastic effort in this direction.
5. In the Punjab I met a Registrar of Cooperatives, one Mr Kapla, who had been trained under [REDACTED] Sir Malcolm Darling. I asked him if he could show me a typical village where the people, through their own efforts, have made a better life for themselves. Immediately he took me to a village of about 100 families situated on a 500-acre tract of land. This land had been fragmented for countless generations as a result of inheritance subdivision. A farmer might have a total of, say, ten acres, split up into as many as thirty separate little parcels. And the village itself, we were told, had been a dirty, ill-smelling place, with no drainage facilities or even any decent paths or roadways. Within the past two years the villagers voted to consolidate their holdings, and the land has now been "defragmentized" from hundreds of tiny plots into 52 fields, each containing the total amount of land previously owned by an individual family. The Government gave the community a grant of 6,000 rupees (about \$1,200), the village assessed itself a like amount and, in addition, contributed its equivalent in voluntary labor. Today the village has been transformed. The streets and lanes are almost all bricked and there are good drains. Fifty motorized (electric) pumps have been installed by the villagers, financed by loans from cooperative banks, 95% of which have now been paid off. And plans are being drawn for a cooperative cold storage plant for potatoes. In two years' time the fog of centuries has been lifted.
6. Although I was invited to visit all of the homes in this community, I had time for only two and in these I was received most graciously. In one of the homes the hostess broke all tradition by bringing out her chest of finery and showing me two beautiful shawls which she had made herself. I asked to have them displayed for the camera and her two daughters, girls around the age of 20, draped them over their shoulders and posed smilingly--even as models might have done in a USA-type style show. This, too, was the new India. It could not have happened back in 1949.
7. [REDACTED] on my first visit to India. I was shown the beginnings of a fisheries cooperative near Calcutta. The people of the local village were among the poorest of India's poor, living in unthinkable squalor, with an income so low as to be almost negligible. Today, after five years of dedicated community effort, it is almost impossible to realize that it is the same village. Three thousand people have been working out their destiny together. The cooperative has flourished and several hundred acres of water-hyacinth have been cleared away in order to make room for fish culture. There is a community center and homes are being built. Furthermore, the villagers are out of debt, having repaid in full a sizable amount borrowed from the Bank for Development.

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8. A great latent power in India, as in many other underdeveloped countries, has been the unused skills and talents of her women. Today they are being unshackled and at the present rate of progress ten years should see almost equal treatment of the sexes. In the cities of India many formerly forbidden pursuits are now open to women. Some have jobs as secretaries and others are employed in various capacities in industry. India is beginning to realize that its woman-power can be an important factor in industrial development, even as it has been in countries like the US and Canada.
9. One thing that impresses a visitor to the hinterland of India is the number of local officials and business leaders who have received their training in Christian missionary institutions. Certainly in the Bengal and Punjab areas at least 50% of the college-trained officials whom I met were educated in mission schools. They are proud of this, even though they may be devout Hindus or Sikhs.

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